

**Mayor's Youth Leadership Council
Center for Youth Leadership**

Why wait for someone else to make a difference?

**Connecticut Assembly's Education Committee
Testimony in Support of HB5315
March 1, 2010**

Introduction

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. We have a special greeting for Senator Boucher, Senator McDonald and Representative Wood, who have worked with us on teen dating violence and human trafficking legislation, as well as Representative Miller, who supports our work in Stamford.

My name is Kristen Bailey and I am from the Center for Youth Leadership, which is based at Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk. I am joined by Adam Shapiro, who is a member of the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council, which is a partnership between the Stamford Youth Services Bureau and Stamford High School.

On behalf of the 314 student activists in our programs, we are here to testify in support of HB 5315 - An Act Concerning Education and the Reduction of Domestic Violence. A companion piece to our testimony is the written statement that was submitted by the YNet Program at the Greenwich YWCA, which has joined us in advocating for teen dating violence legislation.

HB 5315 and Teen Dating Violence

One of the first things we learn in our activism training is that change takes time. That training has served us well since 2007, which is when we launched our teen dating violence social change campaign. The campaign includes research, countless public awareness around the state, volunteer work with middle school students, and policy issues. On the policy side:

1. We convinced the Connecticut Department of Public Health to revise the survey it administers to teens; the Department now collects data on *multiple types* of teen dating violence, rather than just physical dating violence, which has been the standard measurement for several years.

2. We introduced legislation last year that received a hearing before the Judiciary Committee.

3. And since November 2009 we have been working with Representatives Mae Flexer, Gerald Fox and Terrie Wood and other members of the House Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence to bring teen dating laws from Rhode Island, Nebraska and Ohio to Connecticut.

Our campaign continues because teen dating violence is one of Connecticut's more stubborn public health issues, with demonstrated connections to school failure, birth control sabotage, drug use, suicide, and adult domestic violence. Our campaign continues because we have promises to keep to teens in Connecticut - the promise of healthy dating relationships; the promise that our campuses and schools will remain free from dating violence; and the promise to change how the State of Connecticut educates people my age about dating violence.

We believe schools can help us keep these promises, which is why we are pleased that the Education Committee has recommended an "in-service training program for teachers, administrators, pupil personnel, paraprofessionals and noncertified employees" in HB5315.

For 180 days a year we spend close to half of our waking hours at school. People we trust work there. People we have grown up with walk the halls with us. People who date each other take the same classes together. And people who know us and our relationships are in a position to make policy changes and offer services that could impact thousands of students. The current approaches used by schools, which are outlined in our written testimony, are well intentioned, but they are not working.

Yes, parents and families play a role in educating us, but we firmly believe that strengthening the skills of teachers, administrators, counselors and support staff to recognize and respond to teen dating violence on campus and in the hallways is critical if we are going to make a difference.

According to the Family Violence Prevention Fund, "As mentors and role models to students, school staff have a tremendous opportunity to impact how students grow to understand and appreciate safe and healthy relationships. If they can shape the way students think and act today, the social norms that perpetuate violence can be extinguished tomorrow."

HB5315 will help the teen dating violence education movement gain traction in more parts of Connecticut; a movement to get more people to talk more openly and to take more action about something that happens in every community, in every school. No one - no one - is immune from the potentially devastating effects that dating violence has on the physical, emotional, academic and social lives of people my age.

Closing

However, a bigger picture remains. In our discussions with the Task Force on Domestic Violence, we recommended three steps that school districts should take to close gaps in policy and services: district-wide written policies to identify, prevent and address teen dating violence on campus and in school; training in teen dating violence for all school personnel, especially health teachers; and health classes about dating violence for students in grades 7 - 12 based on a standard curriculum, or sets of curricula.

We look forward to working with you on HB5315; our recommendations to close the gaps in policies and services; and the teen dating violence education reforms outlined in the report of the House Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence. Thanks for the opportunity to share our recommendations. We would be happy to take questions.

Gaps in Services at Schools

Excerpt from our January 5, 2010 discussion
with the Task Force on Domestic Violence

"The current methods used by many schools in Connecticut are not working. Here's one thing that some teachers do. They go on-line and piece together material from a wide variety of sources. The teachers are well intentioned, but without training in dating violence they may not know what they are looking for, and they may use sources that do not reflect youth culture or youth-specific risks and resources.

In another method used by teachers, they invite domestic violence educators into class for a 45-minute discussion. Great idea, but here are the problems with this approach. The community educators are not familiar with the culture of the school. They are rarely seen again. The discussions are not co-led with the teacher. And very little - if anything - is done to strengthen the skills of teachers, administrators and counselors; the very people who are *in school every day*, and who see and must respond to dating violence on campus.

We need people who are in school day in and day out to receive training in the warning signs of dating violence, safety planning, and how to respond to victims and abusers.

That's why we took this step in October 2009. We ask that you follow our lead. We sponsored a six-hour curriculum workshop that included 16 health teachers from high schools in our towns; two staff from a local domestic violence agency; and two social workers from one of our school based health centers.

They received training, sets of a curriculum and evaluation material, with the understanding that they would test the curriculum in class through June 2010. They said that the training provided them with 'excellent resources' and 'gave them tools they can use immediately in class.' "

Sources, policy statements for school districts

California Women's Law Center at www.cwlc.org. Click on "Press/Publications."
Break the Cycle, Inc. at www.breakthecycle.org. See the "Model Policy Toolkit."

Sources, teacher training and classes for students

Lindsay Ann Burke Act of Rhode Island at www.labmf.org.
Safe Dates curriculum

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